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Journey of a self-effacing wife to a self-conscious woman

Abstract: Manju Kapur is among the prominent writers of Indian origin. The very feature that differentiates her female protagonists is their attitude towards tradition and modernity. Her female protagonists have daring and desires. This paper traces ‘the journey of Astha from a self-effacing wife to a self-conscious independent woman’, as the novel presents the transforming role of woman, moving far from conventional depictions of perennial woman towards confident, emphatic and aspiring one, along these lines giving a mode of self-articulation. Modern Indian women writers feel that the time has come to state their distinction as free individuals. They have an unequivocal kind of persona. These authors explain feminal experience and another individual vision. They attempt to reveal those components of 'self' which had been covered up under the social and man centric legends of selfhood. They delineate disappointments of ladies living in a male-dominated society and they manage themselves like desire, sex, love distress, despondency and so on. They are the pioneers to investigate some elite female regions of erotic nature and sexuality. Their topics endeavour to motivate women to confront the difficulties and have a significant existence.

Keywords: Self-effacing, individuality, traditional, desire, obligation.

Introduction

Writers like Nayantara Sahgal, Kiran Desai, Manju Kapur, Anita Desai, Bharati Mukherjee, Kamala Markandya, Shashi Deshpande etc. have depicted modern woman as an individual defying the customary character, ending the quietness of anguish, attempting to move out of the confined presence and stating the individual self. Their modern woman is attempting to act naturally but then does not wish to separate from family. These authors portray woman as important figure, featuring her expectations and dissatisfactions. Through their characters, they present the predicaments that are encountered by the modern women in a patriarchal society. The female characters are depicted as scholarly people, mindful, valiant, dedicated to their obligations, and yearning for freedom. These attributes are the archetypes of the modern woman. Rashmi Bajaj (1996) comments upon the latest works of these women writers:

“We have increased social consciousness, a strong awareness of identity as woman, championing of women’s cause, problems of alienation and identity crises, daring portrayal of sex and emphasis on the study of personal relationships”.

The very feature that differentiates Manju kapur’s female protagonists is their attitude towards tradition and modernity. Her female protagonists have daring and desires. They can go to any level to fulfil their desires although they pay heavy price for their desires. They want to live their life freely. They are full of self-confidence.

A Married Woman (2002) revolves around Astha, the female protagonist. It talks about the different phases of a woman’s life, before and after marriage. By keeping traditional values, Astha’s parents are desperate for her marriage. The mother of Astha has the opinion: “There is time for everything. The girl is blossoming now. When the fruit is ripe, it has to be picked. Later she might get into wrong company and we will be left, ringing our

hands. If she marries at this age, she will have no problem for adjusting. We too are not so young that we can afford to wait" (2002). Astha was brought up in a bourgeois family yet she smashed the chains of her customary family. Prior to marriage she had feelings for a man. These sentimental emotions of adoration blossomed in her heart from adolescence. Though, whole scene was culminated when Astha's mom grumbles against it to Bunty's family.

In the last days of graduation, her aching heart finds relaxation in the luxurious ambience of Rohan. Astha's aspirations receive a setback when she realizes that Rohan has left her behind for his higher education to Oxford University.

In the meantime, Astha gets marriage proposal from Hemant, who has completed his MBA from America, is an Assistant manager in a bank of Delhi. During commencement of their wedding life, Hemant appears to counterpart her fantasy of a perfect spouse and this marriage appears to satisfy her energetic dreams. Like a typical Indian girl, Astha restricts her reality to her room where she delighted in the joy and for which she held up for the duration of the day even at the job or at home. In her beginning of marriage, she appreciates life. She was wife of Hemant but from the sky of romance, one has to come down to the ground of realism. Then their marriage falls into the expected pattern.

When Astha was expecting her first child, her mother-in-law wishes her to have a boy. The novelist depicts such an antagonism within a world of gender politics, where male figures and female agents of patriarchy set the limits within which women must struggle for their version of individuality. Their first child is a girl. Hemant's desire to have a son makes Astha dissatisfied and uneasy. When Astha is pregnant for the second time, everyone hopes for the birth of a son. "When Astha's son was finally born, she felt gratitude as profound as it was shamedher status rose.....she was fulfilled" (2002).

Being married, Astha turns into a supporting wife and a yielding mother. Her inconsistent incongruence with her corporate reasoning spouse constrains her to assume the job of 'mother and father' for her children. This denies her self-satisfaction and prompts the crumple of the foundation of marriage. Fretfulness drives her to appreciate supreme forlornness, a kind of entanglement by the family, its responsibilities, its unpretentious abuse and she desires for opportunity. She is choked with the developing needs of her family and continually fulfilling everyone's needs. Astha comprehends a married woman's place in the family to be that of an unpaid worker. According to her "A willing body at night, a willing pair of hands and feet in the day and an obedient mouth", (2002) are the essential requirements of a married woman. She thinks marriage is an atrocious choice as it places her in a situation of fury, torment and uncertainty. Making a decision about the male impression of woman she imagines that a woman is an object of "mind fucking" (2002). For her, marriage is not just sex; rather it brings delight, affection and admiration. Being torn between her obligation and duty, confidence and actuality, public essence and individual morals she anticipates "a tired woman cannot make good wives" (2002) and battles for a passionate opportunity.

The novel is filled with a ton of occurrences one can correlate with. It opens numerous perspectives which can't be trivialized. Hemant does not include Astha in any of the monetary choices, and the way he does not comprehend her emotions and yet Astha needs to carry on the demands of an auspicious wedded life only for her kids and family. Astha's state of mind and her sensitive nature cannot be understood by Hemant and her family. Astha suffers humiliation and exploitation by the elders and society.

Gradually Astha turns to write poetry and this alleviates the heaviness inside her. Art is a refuge to her, she struggles to express herself, put her thoughts on the canvas. Her thoughts and assessments are incessantly discouraged by Hemant and Astha's needs as an

individual are for the most part restrained by her duties towards her lineage. Her life turns upside-down, when Aijaz goes to the school where she teaches. He approaches her to build up the content for a play focused on Babri masjid strife.

It is for the first time when Astha comes across a man who values her ability and subsequently feels attracted to him, however, he is brutally murdered. Her aching heart gets some relief in the caring words of Aijaz. It allots a sense to her emotional needs.

The novelist shows that despite these obstacles that Astha faces from her husband and his family, Astha is able to exercise her agency in forming her own views on the national and the religious through a conscious decision that she makes. Her growing awareness of religious conflicts that exist outside the safety of her home comes about through her interactions with Aijaz Khan, a secular Muslim. Averse to the setting of common turmoil in India with the Hindu-Muslim clash over sacrosanct ground in Ayodhya, Manju Kapur builds up the distress inside Astha's life.

Another example of her self-consciousness can be seen in the description of Astha and Pipeelika's relationship. Pipeelika is a widow of Aijaz. Their loneliness and need bring them closure. Pipeelika offers her much comfort because they are facing the same trauma. Her suffering compels her to fall in an inescapable situation. A Married Woman investigates Astha's yearning for a reason to her life other than being a mother and wife.

The denial of dignity and the blame of being irresponsible towards her family kept Astha in perpetual mental turmoil. It is in this scenario that Astha meets Pipeelika Trivedi. The feeling of betrayal on discovering the traces of her husband's infidelity in his tour luggage made Astha justify her own relation with Pipee. Her closeness to Pipee made Astha communicate with her very easily and on all levels. She felt comfortable in her relation with

Pipee and no one suspected their relation. Astha's search for soul-mate finally culminated in Pipee. She felt complete with her.

A Married Woman offers a fascinating glimpse into the workings of a woman's mind as she struggles to come to terms with her identity in the society. Astha is such a person who is in search of her identity and the one who could be helpful to her in her pursuit. She formed relationship with the couple of boys.

"She represents the whole woman race, the changing Indian society where the upper-middle-class educated woman who, although financially independent, is still facing the problems of adjustment between the old and the new, between appearance and reality and between theory and practice. It explores the space of such women through Astha and boldly presents a new perspective." (2012)

It is a novel which incites our contemplations with respect to how Astha, a married girl looking for her individuality, enrolls her dissents against existing male centric set up and emanates as a self-made woman. Astha needs to break her reliance on others and continue on the way of full human status that represents a risk to her husband and his male prevalence. She ends up caught between the weight of present day creating society and shackles of traditional inclinations. She sanctifies and remarks on her feminine reasonableness, by elevating the social problems identified with women.

Manju Kapur describes through her protagonist (Astha) (2016):

"A woman should be aware, self-control, strong will, self-reliant and rational, having faith in the inner strength of womanhood. A meaningful

change can be brought only from within by being free in the deeper psychic sense”.

Conclusion

The novel uncovered the private relationship. The novelist has stayed extremely honest in introducing the women and the difficulties they face in their idiosyncratic, religious, proficient and socio-political dimensions. As we realize that woman's individual self has less acknowledgement and self-effacement and self-sacrifice has been a woman's typical lifestyle for a very long time. Women presumably, have procured established privileges of correspondence with men; however the adjustment in social frames of mind towards women is yet to be accomplished. In such a situation, her voyage from 'verge' to the 'cynosure' turns out to be significantly more stimulating. With the development of society, change is perceptible.

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